

This one's going to fly

MUSIC INTERVIEW

Mercury-nominated duo Neon Neon take their supercar concept album out on the road

'There were real risks we took with this album, so to have people actually get it and nominate it for a prize is amazing,' says Bryan Hollon, aka California-based Boom Bip.

The hip hopper-cum-producer is talking about *Stainless Style*, the Mercury-nominated LP he released earlier this year with Super Furry Animals frontman Gruff Rhys. Operating as Neon Neon, they recorded the album under two self-

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imposed directives: rather than file sharing, the far-flung pair would work in a studio together and secondly, the music would be a departure from the moody experiments and psyched-out indie the two were hitherto known for.

'We wanted something that was outside of ourselves,' he explains. 'So there are lyrics here that Gruff wouldn't dare usually write and there are plenty of things that I wouldn't dare put on a Boom Bip record. I wanted to step out of that and do something fun, so I started writing these shiny, glossy songs with a verse/chorus structure, something I had never done before.'

At first, Hollon's tracks were so different he proposed that Neon Neon



Star car: Gruff Rhys (left) and Bryan Hollon are the creators of *Stainless Style*, inspired by the life of John DeLorean

be a near-anonymous, Daft Punk-style project, the pair's true identity hidden behind manipulated vocals and uncharacteristic production techniques. They later backtracked on this, Rhys's unmistakable Welsh-accented English lending a palpable pathos to what is essentially a concept album charting the dips and peaks of the late John DeLorean: the automobile mogul behind the stainless-steel craft that would go on to spirit Michael J Fox's Marty McFly back to the future.

'Writing about myself over all this

big, flashy music just wouldn't have worked,' affirms Rhys. 'I stumbled across a picture of the DeLorean car and it reminded me of what was on the news when I was a kid, with his controversial factory in Belfast and the FBI's drug sting on him [DeLorean was subsequently cleared of all charges]. I was just going to write one song about him, but the more I found out, the more I realised the whole album should be about him.'

Pulling off the not inconsiderable feat of being a cohesive concept record, which can count almost all of

its 12 tracks as potential singles, *Stainless Style* features a panoply of guests, from The Magic Numbers and Welsh songstress Cate Le Bon to US rhyemmen Spank Rock and Fatlip.

'When we started getting the guests in, it was like having all these characters telling DeLorean's story from different points in time in a film,' Hollon explains. 'At his darker moments, it was good to have these really grimy beats, with Spank Rock telling the hustler side of his life, whereas a lot of Gruff's pop songs are about the high points of his life.'

Supported by hardcore party duo Yo Majesty on their forthcoming UK dates, Neon Neon's live show features Le Bon and Sean Tillman, aka R&B MC Har Mar Superstar.

'Whereas before it was just a bunch of people onstage, now we feel like a real band,' says Hollon. 'We're a strange band, though. Like a supergroup of nobodies.'

Nadine McBay

Stainless Style (Lex Records) is out now. New single *Dream Cars* follows on Dec 8. www.myspace.com/neonx2 Neon Neon play *The Glee Club*, Birmingham, on Nov 10

GIG

Jackie-O Motherf**ker

Hell will probably freeze over before Portland, Oregon's resolutely underground experimental folk-rock collective Jackie-O Motherf**ker ever put out something as conventional as a best of compilation.

However, if you're looking for an easy-ish way into the band, you could do a lot worse than their new album, *The Blood Of Life* (out Nov 3). Recorded live, it's a stripped-down five-track set that takes in two Jackie-O classics – the broken-down Americana of 2005's expansive *Hey! Mr Sky* and the following year's *The Grave* – and a re-recording of the hymnal, spiritualized-sitting-round-a-campfire loveliness of the title track to this year's *Valley Of Fire* album.



Throw in two new songs and you have yourself a perfect Jackie-O primer; an almost generous offering to their new record label, Fire, from this notoriously difficult bunch.

That's the key, though; if you've glanced at this article and assumed that any band with that name is going to scare the bejesus out of you, Jackie-O's fairly open secret is that their music leans heavily towards the gorgeous.

True, their heavily improvisational live shows can veer toward the fractious at times, and band leader Tom Greenwood has a reputation for having fallen out with just about everybody he's ever met, but if the gorgeousness comes with the price of slight sociopathic tendencies, it's a price worth accepting.

Andrzej Lukowski

Tonight, *The Charlotte*, 8 Oxford Street, Leicester, 8pm, £6, £5 adv. Tel: 0116 255 3956. www.myspace.com/jomf

THEATRE REVIEW

Macbeth

★★★★☆

After countless contemporary interpretations, Lucy Pitman-Wallace's decision to set the timeless Shakespeare tragedy in medieval Scotland seems more like a stroke of originality than a retreat. The set and lighting give her deceptively simple production an air of expressionist menace, but this is *Macbeth* stripped back to its essentials. Liam Brennan is utterly convincing as the warrior corrupted by power and fear, and while there's an early staginess to Allison McKenzie's *Lady Macbeth* (pictured with Brennan), she delivers a wrenching final scene, as guilt trips her into madness. The bleak tone is contrasted by the rare moments of light relief, as Jimmy Chisholm's porter plays the fool, and when the feast interrupted by the ghost of Martin Ledwith's Banquo turns into black farce. WB



Until Nov 15, Nottingham Playhouse, Wellington Circus, Nottingham, Tue to Sat 7.30pm, mats Thu and Nov 6 and 13 1.30pm, Nov 8 2.30pm, £7.50 to £26.50, £6.50 to £25 concs. Tel: 0115 941 9419. www.nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk

ART

Danse Macabre

After a successful debut last year, the organisers of Danse Macabre have gathered a further selection of works from 19 regional and national artists exploring dark moods, romantic dystopias and subcultural leanings.

Among the highlights of this second bite of the Halloween cherry are Matthew Vickerstaff's works under the name Darkwave Art (pictured), which depict underworld landscapes with all the hyper-gothic stylings of a black metal album cover.

Charlotte Thomson's pen-and-wash illustrations evoke a decadent 19th-century world of femmes fatales and dangerous men in capes, and Paul Bowring's acrylics suggest the bad dreams of the Victorian figures occasionally glimpsed in the shadows.

Marianne Chinnery constructs

three-dimensional pieces where home-made dolls and puppets take on the air of stills from Czech and Polish animations. Sue Burns' ceramic horses seem to occupy a space midway between ancient Greek artefacts and unknown marine species.

Add to this Geoff Sims' graphic expressionist panels, with their moonlit mountains pine forests, hot-air balloons and ruined towers, and Trak E Smith's simultaneous solo show, *Dark Entries*, including the graveyard photography of *In His Hands*, and it looks like Danse Macabre is the place to go this autumn for old-school Halloween



chills, and a few mordant reflections on existence.

Wayne Burrows

Tomorrow until Nov 3, *View From The Top Gallery, Top Floor, Waterstone's, 1-5 Bridlesmith Gate, Nottingham*, Mon to Sat 10am to 7pm, Sun 10.30am to 5pm, free. Tel: 07951 997528. www.dansemacabre-art.co.uk